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## W. T. BEST: HIS LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WORKS

By ORLANDO A. MANSFIELD

**C**ONCERNING the career of a musician of whose performances upon his own particular instrument the late Mr. Stephen S. Stratton, sometime musical critic of the Birmingham *Daily Post*, England, declared that "it would savour of impertinence to speak," we might reasonably expect to find a vast amount of published facts at once interesting and inspiring. But in the case of Mr. W. T. Best—the musician to whom Mr. Stratton refers—these anticipations fall far short of actual realization. For this failure there are two reasons. In the first place almost next to nothing is known of Mr. Best's private life. One of his American students—Mr. Everett E. Truette, of Newton, Mass., the well-known and highly respected composer, organist, and church musician—declares that he found Best "cordial, warm-hearted, enthusiastic, and entertaining"; but it is an open secret that the great concert organist, in spite of his world-wide reputation, was, as Mr. Henry Davey asserts, "somewhat eccentric and in the main a recluse." Then, in the second place, Best was unfortunate enough to be an organist; and, alas! an English organist to boot. Had he been a long-haired Pole, or a lean and lanky Paganini, reams of paper would have been spoilt, and pints of good printers' ink spread, in the public setting forth of his virtues and vices both moral, social and professional. But the organ—perhaps on account of its general inaccessibility and frequent if not "extreme invisibility"—is an instrument concerning which the general public often manifests but little interest and possesses even less knowledge; and, further, although the organ has inspired some fine poetical passages from Milton to Lowell, there is no English poem of note to the memory of an organist unless we except Browning's Abt Vogler. Indeed, the organist, despite the fact of his being the most intellectual of all musical performers, is an artist often unwept, frequently unhonoured, and still more frequently unsung. Hence it comes that the accepted details of Best's life are prosaic rather than



WILLIAM THOMAS BEST.

BORN, CARLISLE, 1826. DIED, LIVERPOOL, 1897.

poetical, possessing scarcely the smallest portion of romance to relieve the tedium of their relation.

Even in his name there was nothing "rich and strange." William Thomas was good old-fashioned English but not exactly poetry. Concerning the parents who gave Best his name we only know that his father was a lawyer, probably in comfortable circumstances, and that his mother, *née* Webster, was believed by her son to have been related to Daniel Webster, the American orator and statesman. Perhaps this ancestry may have had something to do with the facility and pungency with which Best was wont to express himself both by tongue and by pen. But, however this may be, when William Thomas first saw the light—on the 13th day of August, 1826—the only romantic thing about his birth was the fine old city in which the interesting event occurred. This city was Carlisle, the place concerning which—if the testimony of Sir Walter Scott is to be accepted—the celebrated David Hume, when on a visit there, scratched on the window of the old Bush Hotel the only rhyme he was ever known to have attempted, viz.:—

Here chicks, in eggs for breakfast, sprawl;  
Here godless boys God's glories bawl;  
Here Scotsmen's heads adorn the wall:—  
But Corby's walks atone for all!

Hume's lines were written at a time when the snort of the "iron horse" was an unknown sound; but even now there are some people to be found who imagine Carlisle to be in Scotland, owing to its close proximity to the border and to its position as a great railway centre through which run all the principal trunk lines from England to Scotland.

The natural beauties of the city remain, while its great attraction is still its cathedral, dating from 1092, the choristers of which, we will charitably assume, no longer merit the strictures of the great Scotch agnostic. According to common report it was within the walls of this cathedral that Best made his first attempts at organ playing, nearly all the records of his life stating that he studied the organ under Young, the cathedral organist. But no one of that name is known in the musical chronicles of Carlisle cathedral. Richard Ingham was organist from 1833-1841 and James Stimpson—afterwards organist of the Birmingham Town Hall,—from 1841-2, by which time Best had bidden farewell to his native city. Mr. Stratton is the only historian who does not endorse the Young legend. In his obituary notice of Best,

in the *Musical Record* of June, 1897, he states that Best took lessons from one John Norman, a deputy organist of Carlisle cathedral. Possibly Young was a deputy organist also. If so the introduction of Norman's name into the matter only makes confusion worse confounded.

But, from whoever taken, the lessons were few and of little determining value. The lad was intended by his parents for the profession of an architect and civil engineer; but a visit to Liverpool, in 1839, presumably to study for these vocations, not only decided young Best against them but definitely disposed him to enter the ranks of the musical profession. He appears, however, to have remained in Liverpool; as we find him, in the following year, securing the position of organist of Pembroke Road Baptist Church, the church in which Dr. Aked, of San Francisco, officiated as minister before leaving for America. From 1840, therefore, Best's career as an organist may be said to have begun; since at Pembroke Road he was fortunate enough to find an organ with a CC pedal board, the first of its kind ever introduced into the great seaport on the Mersey. The importance to Best of this acquisition it is almost impossible to overestimate, as it not only enabled him to acquire a correct pedal technique, but also prevented him from sinking to the level of the average parochial organist of that period. In ninety-nine out of every hundred churches in Best's boyhood days, the manuals of ordinary organs, as our readers are doubtless aware, extended only to GG, and in the case of instruments of the first magnitude, to CCC; while the pedals usually consisted of an octave or so of straight keys operating on a few Open Diapason pedal pipes. These, of course, permitted of little or no execution; and could, as a rule, only be used to render holding notes in the bass—such as at the cadence of an anthem or voluntary—or to sustain a dominant or tonic pedal in a fugue. Thus Best, who, as we shall see presently, was "a master of ironical wit," describing the playing of Bach's music on the organ by Thomas Adams (1785-1858), a London organist "of much celebrity in his day," and "a very remarkable extempore player," declared that "with his enormous contrapuntal talent," Adams "regaled himself by serving up one or two of Bach's '48', adding a droning pedal when his bunions were propitious."

This, although "spoke sarcastic," conveys a very fair representation of the limited pedal technique of the old GG organists. Some idea of the style of their manual playing may be gleaned from a description given by the late Mr. F. G. Edwards, sometime editor of the *Musical Times*, of the playing of James Turle

(1802-1882), for half a century organist of Westminster Abbey. Mr. Edwards says:—"He (Turle) extemporized upon the Great Diapasons in a masterly manner for some minutes, but I do not think he lifted his hands from the keys once during the whole time. Suspensions, sequences, and imitations were there in rich abundance, but of phrasing there was hardly any trace." The music, original or arranged, intended for these old English organs was of a vastly different character from that designed for the modern instrument. This can best be realized by a study of Vincent Novello's arrangements for the organ of the orchestral accompaniments to the Masses of Haydn and Mozart; or of the same editor's Select Organ Pieces, issued from 1830 to 1842, in the opinion of Dr. James Higgs, "one of the most important contributions to the list of arranged organ music that has ever been given to the world." Organ music on three staves when performed in England at that period was generally executed as an organ duet for manuals only. In this way Benjamin Jacob (1778-1829), Samuel Wesley (1766-1837), and Vincent Novello (1781-1861), rendered many of the organ fugues of Bach and arrangements of the oratorio choruses of Handel. Most of the GG organs had their Swell manuals extending downwards to tenor C only, and were tuned to unequal temperament, thus further limiting their utility; and while solo stops were rare, mixtures were far too much in evidence.

The wider manual compass enabled the lack of a complete pedal clavier and of an adequate pedal technique to be partially concealed by a possible and (in the case of some players) a persistent doubling, by the left hand, of the real bass in the octave below; but, as Mr. F. J. Livesey, organist of the Priory Church, St. Bees, Cumberland, England, and one of Best's English pupils, says of the leading organists of that time, "their chords would sound clumsy in the bass (too many low notes being played close together with the left hand); while the inner harmonies, necessary for producing the full effect we are now accustomed to, were omitted altogether."

The shortened pedal board was undoubtedly a money-saving device introduced by the organ builders working amidst the gilded corruption of immediate post-Restoration times. Obviously its employment necessitated a proportionate elongation of the manuals, but why such a faulty system should have been not only tolerated but stubbornly maintained in a land from which has originated almost every organ invention of value, such as the swell pedal and the swell box itself, the composition pedals

and pistons, the concussion bellows, the radiating and concave pedal board, and the pneumatic and electric actions, is a mystery the solution of which is beyond the province of this paper either to attempt or to determine.

This description of organ conditions obtaining in England in the earlier part of the last century not only assists us, in a future stage of our discussion, to understand the superiority of Best, as an organist, over the majority of his fellow performers, and the great influence exercised by his public playing and his writings; but it also shows us, at the present progress of our argument, that Best could not have found many, if any, good teachers capable of directing his studies on an organ of modern construction and correct compass. At Liverpool he appears to have taken some lessons in theory and organ playing from Mr. John Richardson, sometime organist of St. Nicholas' Church, the Roman Catholic pro-cathedral of that city. Remembered to-day in England—a country in which the composition of hymn-tunes is taken seriously and contributed to by the “chief musicians”—by his hymn tunes *Tichfield* and *St. Bernard*, still found in some American hymnals, Richardson was said to have been an ardent advocate of the CC pedal board; and Best, in later life, is known to have spoken of his teacher’s abilities, as an organist, “in the highest terms.” But, as Mr. H. Heathcote Statham says:—

All Best’s acquirements on the organ and in musical knowledge were entirely due to his own study and his own genius for the instrument. He passed through no conservatoire training; and, with the exception of a short course of lessons in his boyhood, he was no one’s pupil but his own. All his execution on the organ, all his exceptional knowledge of organ effect, were the results of his own unremitting practice and his own innate æsthetic perception.

What Mr. W. H. Husk once called Best’s “rigid course of self-study,” included two years at Liverpool, during which, in addition to regular daily organ practice, he persistently worked at scales and technical exercises on the piano, so that “in addition to remarkable technical facility he had a special gift for extracting a rich, beautiful tone from the domestic instrument.” Speaking of his later and more intimate life, the writer of an obituary notice in the *Musical Times* remarks,

after dinner, on condition that the room was darkened, he would play for an hour or two without intermission, to the delight of his fortunate and spellbound visitors. His published pianoforte music, now

almost forgotten, furnishes evidence of his complete knowledge of the capacities of the pianoforte keyboard.

Of course it is not a matter for surprise that around the student days of such a taciturn individual there are still floating many unauthentic stories. Foremost amongst these tales is the legend of the man who would shut himself in a church all day for practice purposes, supplying himself beforehand with sundry cold mutton chops and divers bottles of British beer, and then leave the bones of the aforesaid chops to rest in peace beneath the pedal clavier, and the beer bottles to be broken up or buried by the verger. Instead of being confirmed, such stories as these have been directly contradicted by Best himself, who has declared that, as a student, he never practiced more than four hours daily, although it was often jokingly said of him that he practiced twenty-six!

When Mr. J. Stimpson vacated Carlisle cathedral for the Birmingham Town Hall, in 1842, he was succeeded by Dr. H. E. Ford, who, born in the same year as Best, died in 1909, retaining his cathedral appointment until 1902. Dr. Ford relates that one day as he was about to enter the cathedral for organ practice, a gentleman with his son stood at the door asking to come in and hear the organ. Dr. Ford at first demurred, saying he preferred to practice alone, but afterwards he relented and permitted the strangers to enter. During the course of his practicing, he asked the young man whether he played the organ, and being told "a little," allowed him to try the instrument and was at once profoundly impressed by the perfection of the ensuing performance. Laying a hand on his shoulder Ford said, "Where do you come from?" The youth replied that he had now left Carlisle and had just become organist of Pembroke Road Chapel, Liverpool. That was the beginning of a life-long friendship between the two musicians, and was one amongst other reasons why Best, in 1856, was invited to join with Ford in drawing up a specification for the new Willis organ in Carlisle cathedral.

After seven years' service at Pembroke Road, Best began to receive some definite reward for his musical industry and perseverance. This came first of all in the form of an appointment as organist to the Liverpool Church for the Blind, a position now occupied by Dr. A. W. Pollitt. A year later, in 1848, he became, in addition to the foregoing, organist to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, and from this time his fame began to spread beyond the banks of the river Mersey. Simultaneously he began to discover that it is not always true that "men will praise thee

when thou doest well to thyself," but rather that, as Shakespeare has it,

No might nor greatness in mortality  
Can censure 'scape.

And "right here," as my American friends would say, Best appears to have publicly exhibited the first symptoms of that acerbity and acrimoniousness which so disfigured the majority of his public utterances and private pronouncements, especially in his later years. It seems that in December, 1849, he presided at the organ at a concert of church music given by the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. The Liverpool correspondent of the *Musical World* described Best's organ accompaniments as those of "a young man of talent, rather too fond of sacrificing the composer's idea to his own facility." Instead of ignoring or, perhaps, profiting by this criticism, which was a matter of opinion and probably contrary to fact, Best replied in detail, closing a lengthy letter to the editor with the words, "Rest assured, Sir, that I claim no acquaintance with the musicians whose 'facility' leads them to vary the text of the composer by the introduction of embellishments, etc., or any other meretricious additions."

A decided indication of Best's growing fame was evinced by his securing an engagement to play on the Willis organ at the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. Here his fine performances aroused considerable enthusiasm, and it is an open secret that his rendering of his own arrangement of Spohr's Overture to *Jessonda*, before the committee of musicians appointed by the Liverpool Town Council to select a builder for the contemplated organ in St. George's Hall, obtained for Willis the contract for the latter instrument. The young organist now appears to have decided upon remaining in London, as in 1852 he became, for a few months only, organist of Lincoln's Inn Chapel, one of the famous city churches belonging to the legal profession. The winter of 1852-3 he spent in Spain—for what reason is not clear—returning in May, 1853. In October of that year his rising reputation secured for him the position of organist to the Royal Panopticon, in Leicester Square, now the Alhambra. Here was erected the largest organ in London, a four-manual instrument by Hill, which was afterwards removed to the transept of St. Paul's Cathedral, and finally to the Victoria Rooms, Clifton, Bristol. On this organ Best played Bach and other classics in such a manner as not only attracted considerable attention but "greatly extended his fame in the metropolis." He appears to

have given lessons on this organ at the rate of 12 guineas for 20 lessons, a fee which works out at the by no means inordinate charge of about \$3 per lesson. In January, 1855, Best became organist of the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, but this position he held only for a few months, as his work in the metropolis came to a sudden and unexpected close. The director of the Panopticon requested Best to play out his audiences at the close of each performance to the strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Had the unfortunate manager known his man as Mr. Stephen S. Stratton got to know him, viz.:—as "before all things a man, an Englishman—quick of temper, but a fine character; a man to claim respect for his art as well as for himself," he would not have made such an extremely stupid request or, having made it, would not have been surprised at its refusal. However, the refusal was given and was immediately followed by Best's resignation and return to Liverpool. Thus there was lost to London a man to whom, says the critic last quoted, was unanimously conceded "the distinction of being the greatest organ virtuoso of his time."

But London's loss was Liverpool's gain. Willis had now nearly completed his organ for St. George's Hall in the latter city. He had largely won the contract by the impression produced by Best's performances on his Exhibition organ, so it seems only in accordance with "the eternal fitness of things" that when the Liverpool organ approached nearer and nearer to completion, and the committee responsible for its installation began to enquire, "Who is to play it?" that Willis should reply, "Why not Best?" At any rate, in August, 1855, Best was formally appointed the first organist of St. George's Hall, Liverpool, at a salary of £300 per annum, increased, in 1883, to £400. Willis always claimed that he had practically put Best into this position, and that he "egged him on" in his playing of overtures and other organ arrangements. It seems scarcely credible, however, that a musician described by Mr. H. Heathcote Statham as "one of the most conscientious of artists," who "demanded far more from himself than the public ever demanded from him," would need any outside stimulus to induce him to exhibit his abilities and attainments to the best advantage.

And now having seen Best safely settled in an appointment which he not only occupied but adorned for forty long years, it will be interesting to enquire into some of the conditions under which he had to work. Concerning the stipend we have already made a statement, and the duties involved by its acceptance

were by no means onerous—nominally consisting of three organ recitals a week—on Thursday afternoons, and on Saturday afternoons and evenings. But owing to the periodical requisition of the building for judicial functions, only about thirty weeks' recitals were really given during the year; and when Dr. A. Lister Peace, a personal friend of the present writer, succeeded Best, the recitals were reduced to two,—on Saturdays only. Concerning these conditions the *Musical Herald* once said that while St. George's Hall was

a glory to the city, it was an admitted blunder to combine a concert hall with law courts. The consequence is that music must give way to the law. Sometimes . . . unless newspapers are watched, people may go down to the hall to hear a recital and be turned away disappointed.

This is much to be deplored, especially as Liverpool has a great floating population of visitors, many of whom are Americans. Considering that the tuning and maintenance of the organ cost something like £200 per annum, it being tuned prior to every performance, and that admission to the recitals is only sixpence (12 cents) in the afternoon and threepence (6 cents) in the evening, it is a matter for regret that anything should disturb their regularity, the more so as the Saturday evening recitals, at least in the time of Dr. Peace, were invariably well attended and frequently crowded.

As to the organ itself, it must not be forgotten that it was the first large concert organ built by "Father" Willis. At the outset it had the advantage of a perfect position, while for "purity, richness, and brilliancy," its stops are unsurpassed, roughness and unevenness being unknown. Its power is never unbearable or overwhelming, although Dr. Peace often assured us that the sonority of the Great organ stops was such that even in the most brilliant climaxes he never found it necessary to couple to them the high pressure reeds of the Solo organ. Dr. Samuel Sebastian Wesley, who drew up the original specification, insisted upon the instrument being tuned to unequal temperament, but in 1867 Best succeeded in getting the authorities to do away with this method, which had by that time become an anomaly. The organ now contains 100 stops—18 on the Choir, 25 on the Great, 25 on the Swell, 15 on the Solo, and 17 on the Pedal—with the addition of 14 Couplers, and a host of accessories, the latter including 36 pneumatic pistons and 10 composition pedals. Originally only the Swell was enclosed, but in 1898 Dr. Peace was instrumental in securing the inclusion of all the Solo stops (except

the heavy pressure reeds) in a specially constructed box. Other improvements then effected were the adoption of the CC to C (5 octaves) manual compass instead of GG to A in alt., provision for changing the pitch to the French Diapason normal, "the replacing of the cast-iron pipes of the lowest octave of the 32 ft. Double Open Diapason on the Pedal organ by pipes of stout zinc," and the increase of the wind pressure on the heavy Solo reeds from  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 22 inches. The original cost of the organ was about £10,000, approximately about \$50,000, but under present conditions the cost of the erection of a similar instrument in America would probably be nearer \$100,000.

The formal opening of Willis's original organ took place on the 29th and 30th of May, 1855, two recitals being given by Dr. S. S. Wesley. But although Best was not legally appointed organist until August of that year, and did not give his first recital until October 20, he had already been heard—in an introductory, experimental, or probationary recital—on May 1 of the same year, in connection with the opening functions. His audience numbered over 2,000; and his programme, doubtless limited in its range by the unequal temperament of the organ, was as follows:—

#### *Part I.—Organ Music.*

Grand Offertoire, Op. 35	Lefébure Wély
Organ Sonata, No. 2	Mendelssohn
Flute Concerto	Rinck
Pastorale and Fuga	J. S. Bach
Organ Concerto, No. 6	Handel
Extempore	W. T. Best

#### *PART II.—Miscellaneous.*

Overture to "Preciosa"	Weber
Andante con variazioni (Septet)	Beethoven
Marche du Sacre	Meyerbeer
Overture, Op. 24	Mendelssohn
The National Anthem, with Variations and Finale	W. T. Best

Commenting on the performance the *Musical World* said:—"The massive compositions of Bach, Beethoven, and Handel were played by Mr. Best with that finish and chastity of style which have elevated him to so high a rank in his profession." The editor had evidently decided to forget, or at least to forgive, the controversy of December, 1849,

But at Liverpool Best did more than set up a standard: he maintained it; and during four decades he so conducted his recitals that, as Mr. Livesey says:

the excellence of his performances at St. George's Hall cannot well be exaggerated. In Best were found all the qualities requisite for a great artist: perfect accuracy, perfect finish, perfect sympathy with the spirit of the music—all of which, together with the fine acoustic properties of the hall and a magnificent organ, seemed to make the performance an ideal one.

And yet there were many who never availed themselves of the privilege of hearing Best at his best, although they had abundant opportunity for so doing. The common people heard him gladly; but his afternoon recitals, timed to suit the convenience of the "upper classes," were often only too sparsely attended. Frequently, as Guilmant once said concerning the size of his audience, there were only "small peoples" present. For this, at times, Best's choice of music was not altogether irresponsible. His technique was such that he knew he could make any music interesting from the purely executive standpoint, but it is probable that he sometimes forgot that in order to really grip an audience the matter of the music must be as interesting as the manner of its performance. However this may have been, it is certain that even when, as Dr. G. Edward Stubbs remarks:

Best was at the height of his career and universally acknowledged to be the world's finest organist; he could not help feeling that the concert organist did not command the respect and homage accorded by the public to the concert pianist. This attitude on the part of music lovers he resented bitterly on the ground that it was exceedingly unjust and inconsistent.

One feature of his recitals was very remarkable, viz., the enormous extent of his repertoire, which was commonly supposed to contain 5,000 pieces. He also held himself ready to play, if requested to do so by private pupil or personal friend, any number from the ten volumes of Bach's organ works, the only condition being that notice should be given him on Thursday for a work to be performed on Saturday—Thursday being the day on which the programmes for the Saturday recitals were sent to press. And if the audiences when Best was occupying the organ stool were not so large as they should have been, they were much larger than when it was known that his place was to be filled by another performer. On such occasions comparisons and complaints were by no means wanting. Towards the latter part of his forty years' service at Liverpool his health frequently broke down, although his appearance was generally robust. One season he was unable to appear at St. George's Hall for a week or so

owing to an attack of gout. Whereupon a local wag delivered himself as follows:—

Best absent was on Saturday,  
He could not play a note, oh!  
And why? Because the gout, they say,  
Unfitted him *in toe-toe*.

Returning to more serious matters, we note that in 1860 Best was appointed organist of Wallasey Parish Church, in Cheshire, on the opposite side of the Mersey. Three years later he returned to the ecclesiastical precincts of Liverpool, and doubled his salary by accepting the position of organist at Holy Trinity Church, Walton Breck. Here he remained until 1879, when he removed to West Derby parish church, situated in another suburb of the Mersey seaport. This latter position, however, he resigned in 1882, after his return from his visit to Italy. It is very doubtful whether Best ever enjoyed his church work as he did his concert engagements. The former was frequently left to the tender mercies of students, and even when the latter were competent they were too often totally unacquainted with either service or organ. We believe that Mr. C. Elbridge Whiting, of Boston, who studied under Best in 1863, and often deputized for him at his church, could tell us some entertaining stories of his experiences in this connection.

Concerning church music and organ accompaniments thereto Best held views which are absolutely unassailable, although the manner of their expression by him was sometimes more forcible than polite. Mr. J. Spencer Curwen—son of the founder of the English Tonic Sol-Fa system of sight-singing, and head of the publishing house of J. Curwen and Sons, whose recent decease is a distinct loss to English musical journalism—in his capacity as Editor of the *Musical Herald* once interviewed Best and inferred from a conversation with the great organ virtuoso that he was “not satisfied with the position the organ takes in worship music,” there being in England (and the same would apply to America and many other countries) no recognized part of the service assigned to it. “It is heard before the service opens,” said Best, “when the people are, as it were, wiping their feet on it; and it is the signal for them to leave the church, as if the instrument were something improper to be heard alone.” Word-painting appears to have been anathema to our hero. “Night,” he said, was “always played softly,” and “light” loudly. “In the Psalms ‘thunder’ is a chance not to be despised, ‘lightning’ is good, but

'snow' puzzles the painter; he can attempt a picture of the 'refuge for the wild goats,' 'the stony rocks for the conies' and 'the lions roaring after their prey,' but the ox and the ass are unmanageable." That these statements were in substance the actual opinions of Best is proved by one of his own pungent letters on organ accompaniments, in the course of which he said that it was "melancholy to record" that organists often used their instruments "in a miserable attempt to imitate the physical operations of nature." This "fell purpose" was mostly accomplished by the right hand, which skipped about in the upper octaves for "lightning or aviary effects"; while the thunder and "the larger fauna of the jungle" were attended to by the left hand, which "stirred up a little open rebellion on its own account by a fearful rumbling and bellowing noise in the deep sounding bass of the unfortunate organ." At the same time Best always held that "a persistent and mechanical repetition of the vocal score is in reality no accompaniment whatever," an opinion which sounds not altogether unlike an echo of the controversy with the Musical World at the close of 1849.

Best's views on amateur musical hymnal editors of the clerical persuasion, and their absurd indications of "expression" are caustically set forth in a letter he once wrote to the late Mr. Cuthbert Hadden, who had appealed to him as to the rendering of the phrase "and peace on earth," from the chorus "Glory to God," in Handel's Messiah. Best declared the passage should be rendered *forte*, "it being," said he,

a challenge or sort of decree. Handel in this passage employs the trumpets for the very purpose of emphasizing it. Nothing is in worse taste than to attempt word-painting in music. In some hymns, for example in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, the miserable editors are perpetually making alternate marks for shouting and whispering when "night" (*pp*) and "light" (*f*) occur. Anything after sundown must be whispered, on principles probably connected with burglary. Thus Smart's tune to "Hark! Hark! my soul," is made ridiculous by the parson editors dividing a couple of lines into a shout followed by a whisper. Now, if the passage you name should be sung soft, then you are equally bound to end the chorus "For unto us" suddenly soft at the last words, "Prince of Peace,"—as indeed I was once petrified to hear a country conductor or beater of the air, actually do. They say he contrived to die in bed after the outrage, instead of being given to the larger fauna.

Probably, in addition to the strong views he held—and never hesitated to express—on church music, another reason why he preferred concert work may be found in its greater continuity. The oft recurring breaks in the church service must have sorely

tried a man of Best's irritable temperament. A great personal friend of the writer, Mr. Ebenezer Minshall, for many years organist of the City Temple, London, tells a good story in confirmation of this theory. He says:

Mr. Best was giving a recital at the Bow and Bromley Institute one Saturday evening. After the performance I spoke to him and asked him if he would play for me on the Sunday evening. He very kindly consented to do so. At first he wanted to play the voluntaries only, but I persuaded him to take the whole service. As he was unaccustomed to Nonconformist "use," I promised to tell him what to do. When Dr. Parker (the minister of the church at that time) rose to give out the first hymn, something like the following took place:

Dr. P. "Hymn No. 344."  
W. T. B. "Do I play over now?"  
E. M. "No, not yet."  
Dr. P. "Hymn No. 344, Tune 37."  
W. T. B. "Do I play now?"  
E. M. "No, no, not yet."  
W. T. B. "—— it! When?"

But after Mr. Minshall had piloted Best through the service as far as the offertory he (Best) asked if he could go on "as long as he liked," and upon receiving an affirmative reply, delighted the congregation with a middle voluntary ten minutes in length. If Best could have found a church in which he could have gone on "as long as he liked," he would doubtless have proved himself a most "fit and proper person" to occupy such a position. But if such an appointment exists, we of this paper have never heard of it. To us it seems that only popular and more or less superficial preachers and politicians are permitted to set at defiance the laws of time and (too frequently, alas!) of sense also.

During the later and most distinguished years of Best's career it is interesting to note that, although he severed his connection with the Panopticon, he did not altogether shake the dust of the metropolis from off his feet. We have already seen him playing at the City Temple, where he also presided at the organ on the occasion of Mr. Minshall's wedding, and he gave frequent recitals at the Bow and Bromley Institute. In 1859 we find him rendering occasional organ solos at the Monday Popular Concerts in St. James's Hall, where was a small organ by Gray & Davison. But on July 18th, 1871, he was honoured by being appointed over the heads of all the metropolitan and cathedral organists to open the Willis organ in the Royal Albert Hall, London, then the largest concert organ in the world, and

to act as the official organist of the building. His programme at the inauguration was:

*Part I.*

Organ Concerto, No. 2	Handel
Choral Song and Fugue	S. S. Wesley
Andante Grazioso (first time, in MS.)	E. J. Hopkins
March in A minor	W. T. Best
Grand Prelude and Fugue in E flat	J. S. Bach

*Part II.*

Organ Sonata, No. 1	Mendelssohn
Andante Pastorale and Fugue, in E	W. T. Best
Air with Vars. and Finale Fugato (1st time)	Henry Smart
Prelude and Fugue in G	J. S. Bach

This “opening” naturally brought Best still more prominently before the musical public of England and its metropolis. Hence, probably, it came about that he was engaged to play the Organ Concerto on the “Selection” day of the Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace; “possibly,” says Mr. Henry Davey, “the first occasion within living memory when any of Handel’s Concertos were played as was intended by the composer.” The experiment was so great a success that Best was secured for subsequent Festivals whenever a Handel organ concerto figured in the Festival programme. At these performances he introduced some of those fine cadenzas to be found in his transcriptions of Handel’s Concertos for organ solo which were the practical outcome of these Festival engagements. Great amusement was caused at these functions by “the *sang froid* manner in which he would insist upon, and doggedly keep to, his own *tempi* . . . . regardless of the exertions of the conductor in trying to keep the band and the organ together.” This shows how remarkable must have been Best’s accentuation on the organ, and how fully he had mastered the comparatively simple means by which it can be produced,—ignorance of which methods by average performers causes them, and the unmusical public, to believe in the fiction that accent is impossible upon the king of instruments.

In the following year—1872—Best resumed his old position of organist to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. And “just about this time” it began to dawn upon the usually benighted minds of Government officials that a man such as Best must be a national rather than a local asset. Accordingly, in 1880, he was offered the option of a Knighthood or a civil pension of £100 per annum. Best characteristically chose the latter, not only on account of

its greater financial value, but also because he had an intense dislike to titles of all kinds, political, social, or academic. The fact of his marriage to a Florentine lady, and the claims of family life, made but little difference to his secluded existence, sedentary occupations, and hatred of all society functions. In a letter to the writer of this sketch, Mr. Everett E. Truette says:

Although I considered Best the greatest executant on the organ of his period, his personality was erratic. When he was in a genial mood he was most companionable; but when he was irritable he was very caustic and sometimes repellent. I saw a great deal of him in London, and had many charming chats with him at his hotel after his recitals. He always drew a crowd, played magnificently, and was in his best mood after a recital when he had his usual "brandy and soda" near at hand.

He had very pronounced ideas about the dignity of his calling. As Mr. T. E. Espin, an English pupil, once said of him, "The perfect independence that came from the consciousness of his own hard work is the explanation of many of his 'humours,' or at least of such as would usually be attributed to conceit or to vanity." In confirmation of this opinion is the story of an incident which occurred at a municipal banquet given in St. George's Hall to celebrate the opening of the Liverpool Free Library and Museum. An officious member of the corporation announced that after a certain toast the organ would play. Best ignored the remark, and continued conversation with the guest adjacent to him. The announcement was repeated, but elicited no response. After a third announcement Best said in a minatory tone, "Well, then, let it play!" Some say that this incident took place in a committee room and not in public; but the fact remains that Best rightly refused to become the servant of the corporation outside the discharge of his official duties. It was, probably, in connection with this incident that the *Musical World* wrote, "Mr. Best is not merely an artist of the first stamp, but a gentleman innate; and his private bearing is as much entitled to respect as his artistic merits are to admiration."

In 1882 the strain of continued work as performer, composer, editor, arranger, and teacher, began to tell upon his health, in order to recruit which he visited Rome, and during the winter there gave an important recital in the American Church in the Via Nazionale, his audience, including the principal foreign ambassadors and of vastly more importance—Liszt, Sgambati, and a large number of other distinguished musicians. To the Italian organists the organ playing of Best not only came as a revelation

but it caused a revolution in their manual and pedal technique. Liszt, it is said, had already met Best. At least, Mr. J. B. Bulley, one of Best's American pupils, relates that Mrs. Best described to him how on one occasion when Best was enjoying a quiet organ practice in one of the Roman churches, and was about to leave the building, he noticed an old man sitting near the door. Thinking he was at his devotions Best disliked to disturb him, but at last had to ask him to leave the building, as he (Best) was responsible for seeing the doors locked. The same thing occurring on the second and third days, Best asked the stranger if he were interested in the music. "I have been listening intently every day to your masterful playing," said the latter, "and may I ask you to play again that number," naming the composition. As it was getting late, Best promised to grant the request if the stranger would come again next day. The old man kept the appointment with evident alacrity, and by frequent requests kept Best playing until daylight faded. He also brought with him a manuscript composition which he begged Best to keep "as a token of thanks from one who has been enthralled for many hours by your playing." Handing Best his card the stranger departed. Too dark to read it, Best put the card in his pocket, and only upon arriving at his room discovered that it bore the name of Franz Liszt. This is a very pretty story, and as it comes to us with the *imprimatur* of a lady it seems somewhat ungallant to question its authenticity. We know, too, that Liszt, then 71 years of age, did spend a good deal of his time in Rome. But we should have thought that his striking personal appearance would have been known to Best; also we should like to know what became of that manuscript, as none of the organ music edited by Best contains an original work of Liszt. A more certain result of Best's visit to Rome was his introduction to the English public of much previously unfamiliar Italian organ music, *e. g.*, the works of Capocci, Morandi, Gambini, P. Fumagalli, Petrali, and others, as published by Best in his *Cecilia* collection or in separate volumes.

But Liszt was not the only one of his craft to understand and appreciate the perfection of Best's organ playing. There is a remarkable testimony from the first husband of Liszt's daughter—Von Bülow—contained in a letter to Mr. T. C. Lewis, the organ builder, and published in the *Glasgow Herald*, November 23, 1877. It refers to the opening by Best of the organ in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, the specification of which had been drawn up by Best and Henry Smart, the great English organ

composer, one of the few English musicians with whom Best seemed to have kept on really good terms. Von Bülow says:—

I never met with an organ so good in Germany, the instruments there not having the same amount of expression and flexibility. . . . If I could longer listen to an organ like this and to a player like Mr. Best, I would—were I not too old—jeopardize my pianistic career and begin to study the organ. . . . In short, despite having been exceptionally fatigued by consecutive concerts and numerous rehearsals, I listened with the most eager attention from the first to the last note of Mr. Best's recital.

One of the most important events in Best's life occurred in 1890, when he was engaged to open the organ by Hill & Son in the Town Hall of Sydney, New South Wales, after the Albert Hall organ, the largest organ in the world, costing £15,000 and having a 64 feet reed on the pedal. Best's twelve performances, commencing on August 9, were immensely successful,—more than 7,000 people attending the eleventh recital of the series. The selection of Best, and his subsequent success in Australia, aroused a good deal of "envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness" amongst some of the lesser lights of the English organ-playing world. One organist of note, who had expected to obtain the Antipodean engagement, ever afterwards alluded to Best as *Mr. Beast*. This was but one, and one only, of many outward and visible expressions of non-recognition of Best's transcendent ability, which would have soured a far more amiable man, and which went so far to account for the occasional brusqueness and harshness of his speech and manners. To give a list of even a tithe of the organs "opened" by Best would be impossible as regards space, even if the materials were available. The Cathedral at Newcastle-on-Tyne and the Queen's Hall, London, may be mentioned, but what are they among so many? Sometimes the course of these organ openings ran anything but smoothly. At one time he absolutely refused to play on any organs having middle C of the pedals under middle C of the manuals instead of D. At another time a cypher or some other easily remedied defect would cause him to leave the building in a rage and his disappointed audience in the lurch. After giving a preliminary recital on a new organ for a church in South Devon, England, he coolly advised the builders to take it out to sea and sink it in the lowest depths of Tor Bay! At St. George's Hall he would leave his seat in the middle of a performance if anything went wrong with the organ, and on one occasion is said to have informed his audience that the tuner was handsomely paid but neglected his work.

It was hoped that Best's visit to Australia would have restored him to comparative health, but instead of this anticipation being realized a contemplated tour through America had to be abandoned and the return journey to England made direct. From that time Best's health declined so rapidly that, in 1894, he retired from his position at St. George's Hall, to the intense regret of organists and musicians in every part of the musical world. The Liverpool Corporation, to their everlasting credit, granted him an annuity, pension, or retiring allowance of £240-5.0 per annum, the highest sum permissible under the provisions of the Liverpool Improvement Act. Unfortunately Best did not long enjoy his well-merited reward. Gout and dropsy set in, his death taking place at his residence, Seymour Road, Broad Green, Liverpool, on May 10, 1897. His remains were deposited in the cemetery of Childwall Parish Church, Liverpool, on May 13, 1897. There, thirteen years later, on December 31, 1909, were also laid to rest the mortal remains of Mrs. Best, who passed away at the advanced age of 80 years. On October 20, 1896, only a few months before his death, there was erected on the platform in front of the organ in St. George's Hall, a commemorative bust of the great virtuoso, in memory of his long series of performances there. The unveiling took place "in the presence of a considerable gathering of citizens" and local aristocracy, the Earl of Derby acting as master of the ceremonies. So that not only was Best honoured in his adopted city and by his fellow-citizens, but he is amongst the very few musicians to whose memories monuments have been erected during their lifetimes.

During the latter part of his career Best did but little teaching. Most of his pupils were English or American musicians. Amongst the former the most distinguished was Dr. Swinnerton Heap (1847-1900), of Birmingham, sometime chorus master of the Birmingham Festival chorus and an examiner for musical degrees in the University of Cambridge. Amongst Best's American pupils we have already mentioned Mr. Everett E. Truette, and there may be added Mr. C. Elbridge Whiting, and Mr. Howard Elmore Parkhurst, recently deceased. Mr. Truette tells us that when he first wrote to Best asking him for lessons, Best sent a sharp reply, stating that he did not teach at all, and ended his letter:

"You Americans are very fond of studying music in Germany and afterwards coming to England to rub off the Teutonic rust." I wrote back, says Mr. Truette, "that, as I had been studying with Guilmant for six months or so, I thought the 'Teutonic rust' was about all rubbed

off." Best then wrote me a most cordial letter inviting me to meet him, and sending me a great package of his music. This was the beginning of a friendship which lasted to his death, and I have many pleasant recollections of long chats with him, when, in spite of his natural irritability, we had many pleasant discussions on organ topics.

It is evident that Mr. Truette not only got on well with Best but had a very accurate estimate of his character, which is the more creditable because—as an American—Mr. Truette could hardly be aware that Best's primary treatment of him was almost exactly what in England we should expect from a North countryman who, though generally a good fellow at heart, has often a rough exterior.

Mr. Truette unconsciously confirms this when he says "Best was greatly maligned by many of his own countrymen as being cross and testy, disagreeable, and the like. His disposition was peculiar and made him many enemies. He was a man of very strong ideas, and never hesitated to give vent to his opinions, oftentimes exaggerating to increase their forcefulness. At one time I was chatting with him about organ builders. Best burst forth, 'That man X. does not know how to build an organ. Look at the organ in —— Hall. He put the solo stops on such a high pressure of wind that it was necessary to chain them to the wind chest to keep them from being blown out through the roof!' I roared, and he, too, burst out laughing. Ten minutes later he was enthusing over the fine work of the same builder in another organ." Mr. H. C. Tonking, of Newquay, Cornwall, England, says:

"Best and Willis quarrelled many times, but the last straw was broken when Willis said to Best that he could *build* and *play* an organ, which was more than Best could do. I believe they almost came to blows—what could one expect from two such fiery negatives."

That Best could say "some nasty things in a very bitter way," was undoubtedly true; but, as Mr. J. Newburn Levien, another of his English pupils, once said:

I knew him for years, and received nothing but kindness from him. Generally speaking, if he had played the game of life half as well as he played the organ he would have been now generally recognized as the learned musician and great executant that he undoubtedly was.

Nevertheless, for ordinary teaching, or for dealing with mediocre ability, Best was temperamentally unfit, as the following story will show. Having been engaged to adjudicate upon the playing of some unfortunate aspirants for a local organ

P.S. I have sent you 3 or 4 new arr. —

4, SEYMOUR ROAD,  
BROAD GREEN,  
NEAR LIVERPOOL

July 16. 1894

Dear Mr. Tomlinson

I have your last - programme, - in which I observe you begin with a Prelude; after this, a voyage to Australia, where people stand on their heads, will be necessary? - Talking of Trumpets, how about that "Fugue on a Trumpet Fanfare," requiring treatment for the heels? - here, the audiences had to be taken to an asylum after undergoing it! - ladies sending me their anklets and wisps of back hair; - the semiquaver pedal passage is quite easy if you will only sup on stewed sels the night before and lucups while playing him. I must end as a stiff attack of dropsy is coming on. - Mountebanks are mounting the Hall organ, here. — No appointment likely till 1899: see 'M. News'.

\* 1<sup>st</sup> passage in D. thus R<sup>1</sup>...G  
L<sup>2</sup>...E  
B<sup>3</sup>...D  
D<sup>4</sup>...A  
2<sup>nd</sup> .. Emuror R<sup>1</sup>..E  
L<sup>2</sup>..C  
L<sup>3</sup>..A  
P..ff

Yours truly  
W. F. Best.

position, he arrived at the appointed place of examination or execution in good time, and after hearing each candidate play in succession, not having uttered a word, he walked up the aisle of the building to the expectant committee and said, or snarled, "Gentlemen, the candidate who has last played is the *least offensive* of the three. I'll take my fee, please."

With the English College of Organists Best would have little or nothing to do. At their first issued (and subsequently withdrawn) regulations he laughed, declaring that they had only to do with the "buttons and trimmings" of the instrument. He has, however, had his revenge, as most of the latest lists of selected solos for the F.R.C.O. examinations include, and specially call for, a Best arrangement. His outward churlishness, as we have already remarked, often led to complete estrangement from many of his fellow-musicians, while jealousy of his superlative gifts caused others to speak "all manner of things falsely" concerning him. Yet Best often evinced true appreciation of a fellow-artist. Alfred Hollins, of Free St. George's, Edinburgh, the prince of sightless organists, was always to him "Alfred the Great"; while his pleasure at the appointment of Dr. A. L. Peace to be his successor at St. George's Hall was expressed by both tongue and pen. On the other hand, he entertained a very wholesome contempt for the "elaborately titled musical man," destitute of practical ability in composition or performance. To Best such an one "suffered from too much alphabet."

Two English organists who particularly aroused Best's ire were Mr. (now Sir Walter) Parratt and the late Dr. E. J. Hopkins, the genial organist of the Temple Church. Dr. Hopkins had designed and, in 1876, opened the organ in the City Temple, London. Some time afterward Mr. Minshall, the organist, invited Best to give a recital on the instrument. "On his arrival," says Mr. Minshall, "Best took a long look at the organ in silence; then he turned to me and said, 'Let me see! old Neddy of the Temple Church was high priest and musical adviser of this parish, I believe.'" In a letter to Mr. H. C. Tonking, Best unkindly, and somewhat unjustly, alluded to Hopkins as a "trimmer," a term which William Thomas proceeded to define as meaning "a man who eats his own expressed opinion if he can curry favour with others." Poor Hopkins had written to the Musical Standard, praising, as Best described it, "organists who grubbed on the lowest octave of the pedals," and had termed the excessive use of the upper notes "twittering on the top F." Best considered that as "Bach and others wrote high" we were "bound to keep

to the text." So, as a joke on poor 'Opkins, as he facetiously termed him, he wrote his fine Toccata in A. There, in the recapitulation of his primary theme we have this passage and



over the pedal part, as shown above, Best sarcastically scribbled, and caused to be engraved, the phrase, "All hail! E. J. H.," an annotation which has often puzzled organists who have ventured on the performance of this delightful piece of organ music. With Sir Walter Parratt the wordy war was on this wise:— In 1892, Parratt, in writing and lecturing, had unfortunately spoken of Best's arrangements as "examples of misapplied skill." Best at once mounted his epistolary war horse and charged full upon the enemy by remarking that on the only occasion on which he had ever heard Parratt perform upon the organ the latter "*essayed* a transcription of Mendelssohn's Overture to Ruy Blas." Then, with true north country directness, Best proceeds to deal faithfully with his Yorkshire opponent in a letter two columns in length, saying amongst other good things,

as regards the organ, it is beyond cavil that a well-known instrumental *adagio* or *andante*, suitably arranged, is infinitely preferable to the frequently dull specimens of modern organ music duly vaunted as being "original." It is melancholy to record that the efforts of some organ composers (many of whom have caudal appendages to their surnames) merely serve to point a moral as well as excite the risibility of foreign critics. If we could obtain anything approaching Mozart's great Fantasia in F minor all would be well. Modern German composers are now timidly adding *cresc.* and *dim.* to their organ pieces, the builders being compelled to advance with the times and provide their lifeless stacks of pipes with the means of musical expression common to all English and French organs." Returning to the charge, Best continues, "The works of Mr. Parratt's favourite composers—Herren Merkel and Rheinberger—though in undeniable organ form, are apt to pall upon cultivated ears. Their numerous 'sonatas' in particular, bear a strong family likeness, the chief themes being encumbered with a wearisome technical development, too often proclaiming the manufactured article rather than the presence of the creative impulse; while the enormous length of many of the movements effectually prevents a frequent performance."

Best then quotes Smart's reply to Chorley's "fierce onslaught on all adaptations for the organ," in the *Athenæum*, 1854, in which Smart describes Chorley's attack as possibly "very sharp writing" but undoubtedly "very fat nonsense," and, by way of a *coup de grace*, sarcastically expresses "a hope that Mr. Parrat, as organist to the Queen, will add to the list of composers for the instrument, as befits his high office." Although Mr. Parratt has long ago become Sir Walter, it does not yet appear that the doughty knight has paid much attention to his deceased opponent's request!

Best's views concerning the organ music of his day, as reported by Mr. J. Spencer Curwen, make delightful reading. "The technical development of the modern German organ sonata," said he, "is too long and profuse: some German organ works should no more be played in public than *solfeggi* should be sung. They are too ponderous and mechanical." On the other hand a good deal of the French organ music was to Best frivolous and neglectful of the contrapuntal side of music, with the exception of the best works of Guilmant and Widor. Italian organ music was little better than "mediocre pianoforte music," and so on. Here Best was evidently fighting a triangular duel, in which both the Central Powers and the Allies came in for their respective punishments.

On organ playing Best's views were founded upon practical experience, and as such were generally unassailable. The left-footed pedalist was to him "the abomination of desolation." To organ arrangements in which the pedal part was too low, and assigned unduly to the left foot, he strongly objected, on the ground that "the goats always go to the left." He advocated the removal of the old swinging-rod swell pedal to the centre (as is done in Mr. Purcell J. Mansfield's Willis organ in Park Church, Glasgow), in order "to rescue the player's right foot from the gouty eminence where it has long been hanging as an awful example to its rinking brother, the left foot, always busy with the very abysses of sound."

On organ building his opinions were often prejudiced. He so detested the movable console as to declare that the cable or rope "ought to be 'round the builder's neck." Mr. G. Laing Miller, F. R. C. O., of New York, in a private letter to the writer, says that in his organ in Wallasey Church, which was designed by Best, there were no composition pedals to the Swell, the couplers were operated by tilting tablets, and out of 29 stops distributed over two manuals, nine were reeds, and two of these were on the pedal. An appeal to have this unsatisfactory condition altered

was referred by the church officials to Best, who simply gave it further approval; so Mr. Miller says, "I had to make the best of it." This was the organ on which Best played from 1860-1863; and where, every Sunday, he used to *crescendo* gradually from the versicle "The Lord's name be praised" until he gave out the Venite *fortissimo*. "This is how it ought to be," he said to Mr. Miller. "Wake the sinners up! They've been cheating and bamboozling each other long enough all the week through!" Another organ which he designed for a Wesleyan church near Liverpool had but one manual, but each stop could be drawn in halves so as to be used as a solo,—an idea he had probably derived from harmonium construction, or from some of the smaller organs he had tried in Italy. Undoubtedly Best was better at destructive criticism than at constructive. He condemned what he described as "the competitive or churchwarden's organ" as an erection "which has long excited the admiration of parish undertakers, being set up in a convenient manner for impending dissolution, a fate which sooner or later overtakes it after enduring frequent doctorings of an expensive kind." Yet, as Mr. F. J. Livesey says, "it was Best who came to the rescue when the art of organ building in England was sadly in need of reform. He stood up bravely for the cause he had at heart, . . . leading the way to further advancement."

Of Best as a virtuoso perhaps, as Mr. Stephen S. Stratton once remarked, "it would savour of impertinence to speak." "Still," says the same sane and reliable critic, "it may be permitted to refer to his clear, crisp phrasing and the wonderful way in which he imparted accent to the organ. Then the smoothness and finish of his octave pedal playing! There are many fine organ players now, but all would concede him the distinction of being the greatest virtuoso of his time."

The *Musical Times* of March, 1894, declared that Best "brought pedal playing to a perfection not hitherto attained." The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says:

His command over all the resources of the organ was masterly: his series of recitals at St. George's Hall included the whole field of organ music, and of music that could be arranged for the organ, ancient and modern: while his performances of Bach's organ works were particularly fine.

Closely watched through an opera glass, Best could never be seen to make the slightest "secondary motion," not even during the most intricate pedal passages. Considering that he had a working repertoire of 5,000 pieces his memory was almost

phenomenal. Abhorring the sickly and sentimental in matter or manner, he was often accused of being deficient in expression. He once said, "We all of us play wrong notes, but I think I play fewer than most people; and so, as they cannot find fault with my technique, I suppose they think they must find fault with something and say I have no expression." This estimate of his accuracy was, however, far too modest. A great personal friend of the writer, Professor H. C. Macdougall, of Wellesley, Mass., relates that he was once told by the wife of Dr. E. H. Turpin, that when Best was giving recitals at the Bow and Bromley Institute, London, students from the London musical academies and colleges would attend in the hope of hearing him play a wrong note, but their visits, though frequent, were uniformly unsuccessful. On being commended by Mrs. Turpin for his unfailing accuracy, he merely replied that he considered it the first duty every artist owed to the public to play the written notes. Indeed, as we have already said, he gave the public more than they ever demanded; and, in giving, he gave royally and with absolute freedom from self-consciousness. As the *Musical Herald* once said concerning his playing, it was "soothing and elevating, faithfully regarding the composer's intentions; matchless in Bach's fugues, and whenever the pedal takes an important part, Best is brilliant." Here it is worth while to note that while in church work he would "indulge his fancies to the full in brilliant extemporizations," in recitals he was "invariably restrained and classical." In his *Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, Mr. James D. Brown, writing of Best as a contemporary, says:

Mr. Best is generally acknowledged to be the greatest master of the organ. He belongs to that school of modern development which endeavours to make the organ the exponent of orchestral works. That the organ is in itself capable of producing orchestral effects in an adequate manner is indisputable, and the excellent manner in which Mr. Best has proved this should be sufficient to reconcile those who imagine that it is performing out of its function and lending its powers to trickery.

In fine, as the Rev. Sir F. A. Gore Ouseley said, "His fame rests mainly on his wonderful skill as an organist, where he need fear no rival in England or on the Continent."

\* \* \*

As the composer is generally supposed to take precedence of the editor or transcriber, we are reminded by Professor Ouseley that Best did not "neglect sacred vocal art, having

composed anthems, services and hymns, some of which have been widely used." Probably the best known of these is his Service in F and his setting (1864) of the Benedicite with free organ accompaniment. But although, in addition to church music, Best produced orchestral marches and overtures, his chief work was for the organ, and it is as a writer for the king of instruments that his reputation as a composer must be determined. Preferring to quote the opinions of abler critics than ourselves, we first note that Professor Ouseley, after describing Best as "one of the most accomplished executants on the organ," goes on to say that "Best has composed and arranged a vast number of pieces for his instrument in a masterly manner, and has thereby laid all lovers of the organ under a deep obligation."

Mr. W. S. Rockstro, formerly a fellow-townsman of the writer of this article at Torquay, England, claims that "Best's organ music, even apart from its musician-like construction, and pure artistic feeling, shows an intimate acquaintance with the character and capabilities of the instrument, which cannot but secure for it a long term of favour." Dr. Baker tersely declares that Best's works are "popular in type, though classical in form," "possessing," says the Encyclopædia Britannica, "a strong and marked individuality." These statements can easily be verified by a practical acquaintance with Best's original organ works, most of which deserve greater attention and more frequent rendering than they have hitherto received. To us, if we may presume to offer our opinion, the greatest weakness in Best's organ composition was "scrappiness," or want of continuity,—the excessive employment of detached phrases. In some of his earlier works this was very apparent, although many of these were individually interesting if collectively unequal.

Perhaps Best's most popular organ piece is his "March for a Church Festival":

Allegro maestoso

f

p

a work of moderate difficulty, but of immense interest to performer and audience alike. The "Psallite omnes Angeli" and the quaint Pastorale are delightful numbers from his Six Christmas Pieces. In his article on Registration in Grove's Dictionary, Mr. H. H.

Statham quotes, from a Rheinberger sonata, a passage involving "the use of flute tone over reed tone on another keyboard, where the flute seems to glide like oil over the comparatively rough tones of the reed." But from the Pastorale last named there is a passage of considerable length, of which we quote the opening measure, which illustrates Mr. Statham's point much better than his Rheinberger quotation:



Amongst Best's larger pieces, in addition to the Toccata in A already mentioned, there are two sonatas, of which the one in D minor introduces the old long metre hymn tune, Duke Street, so popular in the north of England and in America, the production of one Hatton, of Duke St., St. Helen's, Lancashire, England, who died in 1793. Amongst Best's Six Concert Pieces (Novello) are some fine numbers, especially the Fantasia in E $\flat$ , Allegro in D, and Air with Variations in A; and the same may be said of his Four Concert Pieces (Augener) of which perhaps the best is the Fantasia on the Welsh air, "Men of Harlech." Best's fugal writing was remarkably skilful when we remember that in this department of musical composition he was practically self-taught. In his Fantasia and Fugue in E minor, he has "introduced and treated in a highly fanciful and original manner" the fine old English tune, known as the Old 81st (Day's Psalter, 1562) which, with many other Reformation psalm tunes, was in all probability the melodic handicraft of the Genevan refugees from the Marian persecution. Another remarkable fugue by Best, the Concert Fugue on a Trumpet Fanfare, is, really, a transcription of a two-part fugue for the piano.

To the variation form Best contributed largely and effectively. Allusion has already been made to his Variations in A and to his Variations on the National Anthem, performed by him at his first recital in St. George's Hall. The latter are, undoubtedly, the best set of organ variations ever written on that particular theme, the variation with double pedal and the finale fugato being of special interest.

The Variations on an original Theme in F, Op. 17, (Cecilia, Bk. 28), written in 1850, are strangely reminiscent of Mendelssohn's Variations Sérieuses. Concerning this work Dr. Peace remarks that "it is by no means so frequently performed as its undoubted merits would appear to warrant." But it is not given to every organist to execute Vars. III, IV, and the Finale, with ease and precision. In his Fantasia on the old Scotch Reformation hymn-tune, Dundee or French (1615), contained in Cecilia, Book 46, and written in March, 1893, Best shows how thoroughly he has imbibed the Bach tradition, and how skilfully he can blend classical treatment with modern thought. His finale is founded upon two themes, and a very novel feature therein is the imitation of the choral theme (announced in the pedal) by diminution at the 4th above in the subdominant key and in the treble, *e. g.*:

An earlier work (Cecilia, Bk. 9), a Scherzo in A minor, is worthy of any of the great classical masters of this form. The *staccato* on the manuals opposing the *legato* on the pedals was a favourite device with Best, *e. g.*,



Another interesting work (*Cecilia*, Bk. 50) is the Allegro Festivo in E flat, the initial figure of which is strangely reminiscent of the fugue subject of the final section of Handel's chorus from *Theodora*, "He saw the lovely youth," e. g.:



This work is dated April, 1894, as is also an Allegretto in B flat. The latter concludes with this exquisite sentence:



reminding us of Shakespeare's line,

"That strain again! it had a dying fall."

Of two Concert Overtures, in C and in B flat, the former, dated October, 1889, is not so effective or massive as that in B flat, entitled Festival Overture (*Cecilia*, Bk. 54). This latter work is really an arrangement of an orchestral overture in C written for the Norwich Musical Festival of 1875, so that it presents Best in the dual capacity of composer and arranger. The work has been thus described by Dr. Peace:—

The alternate passages between the trumpets and the full orchestra form an appropriate Introduction which leads into an Allegretto con Moto: Alla Marcia. This in turn is followed by the principal movement, an Allegro based upon two contrasted subjects, the second of

which is assigned to the softer instruments. After this the march is again taken up, this time with the full power of the orchestra. A recapitulation of the two themes referred to (followed by a brilliant coda) makes up the remainder of this effective overture which in every aspect befits its festival title.

Although Best's influence as a teacher was comparatively slight, "his didactic works," says Mr. James Brown, "are remarkable for the clearness of their explanations and the practical character of their descriptions." The works here referred to are the *Modern Organ School* (1853), written during his London residence, and the *Art of Organ Playing*, commenced in 1869. The former work contains the excellent studies for manuals and pedals, Op. 26, some of which are quite interesting as music. In these studies Best uses the capital letters R and L for right and left foot, and a lower case h for the heel; instead of the simple signs  $\wedge$  and  $U$  above the pedal staff for the right foot, and below it for the left, as is now almost universally employed. He also adheres, here and elsewhere, to the orchestral or so-called "English" fingering, + 1, 2, 3, and 4, the passing of which is much to be regretted, the stupidity of having one set of fingering for orchestral and another for keyboard instruments being almost worse than criminal. Best's work continued with 8 Trios for 2 manuals and pedals, 6 hymn-tune studies and an original setting,—in anthem form, in 8 parts, for 2 choirs,—of Bishop Ken's Evening Hymn, "Glory to Thee, my God, this night."<sup>1</sup> After this we have 24 fine studies which for musical and technical value are infinitely superior to anything contained in Rinck's *Organ School*. Indeed, they may be said to contain in miniature almost every variety of organ technique, expression and phrasing. Here is a simple quotation from No. 4:

Allegretto

The work concludes with a Fugue in F and the Variations on the national Anthem, Op. 29, already alluded to. The *Art of*

<sup>1</sup>This hymn, the Morning Hymn, "Awake, my soul, and with the sun," and the Doxology, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow," were probably written at Longleat House, Wiltshire, England, close by the birthplace of the writer of this article. (See *The Churchman*, Nov., 1913).

Organ Playing gives, in the first part, manual and pedal exercises, and studies on Gregorian tones with their various endings and some old English psalm tunes. The second part consists of fine original and selected studies, followed by a number of "detached examples from the works of Bach and other composers shewing how passages of special difficulty are to be played." There are also some selected compositions of the Bach school and a fine Solemn March in A minor by Best himself. As an example of organ erudition the volume is well worthy of study.

Best as an editor will always be remembered by his masterly edition of Handel's Messiah, the first to include Mozart's additional accompaniments arranged for the pianoforte or organ. He also edited for Novello the vocal score edition of Mozart's Requiem Mass, and several other works, including Bach's immortal "48," Rinck's Organ School—the most perfect edition in existence—and the larger portion of Lefébure Wély's compositions for the organ. For Boosey, Best edited volumes of Handel's oratorio and opera songs; for Schott, albums of organ works by Lemmens and selections from his Organ School; for Ricordi, a volume of Italian organ music, the first of its kind in England, as well as editions of the works of Morandi and Gambini; and for Augener, the works of Benoist, Boély, Capocci, &c. Best's edition of Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas (Novello) was, at the time of its production, London, February, 1871, the only edition then on the market in which any attempt had been made to render clearer the division of the parts "by a more frequent use of the middle staff for the 'left hand' part," thus making the music "easier to read." That his edition fully justified the claim he made for it cannot be denied, the only regret being that he did not give us some indication of his own phrasing in substitution for, or instead of, Mendelssohn's antiquated and often imperfect method of phrase notation. For Messrs. Cocks & Sons, one of the principal English publishers of the mid-Victorian period, Best edited two volumes of organ music, entitled, "A Collection of Organ Compositions Ancient and Modern." Although many of the selections included therein were somewhat uninspired and uninteresting, we believe this was the first English collection which contained Gade's Op. 22 and the popular Andante and Allegro in D by F. E. Bache (1833-1858), the Birmingham pupil of Liszt, who died at the early age of 25. Best himself contributed a Pastorale in C with a "storm" episode. But all the shortcomings of the work were more than atoned for by the insertion, at the end of the second volume, of Best's arrangement of Mozart's magnificent

Fantasia in F minor, which, as every student of musical history knows, was the first of two Fantasias written in 1791 for an organ actuated by clock work mechanism in a fine-art exhibition in Vienna.

But the finest collection of original organ music ever edited by Best was undoubtedly that entitled "Cecilia" (Augener). This was commenced about 1880, and 56 books were issued under Best's editorship, the remainder being undertaken by Dr. Turpin, who also passed away while the work was still in progress, in 1907. In this series were included composers of almost every European nation—English, French, Belgian, German, Italian, Danish, Swedish, etc., Its eclecticism alone should secure for this work a place in every organist's library.

As an arranger and transcriber of organ music Best's achievements were, if possible, even greater than as a performer. Indeed, so extensive were his activities in this direction that it would be almost as impertinent as impossible to attempt anything approaching a detailed description of them. In general terms his arrangements may be summarized as "full and yet faithful to the original score, widely known, and unsurpassed," the work of a man who "unlike many soloists was an all-round musician and fully acquainted with every branch of the art." As Dr. Peace says:

the use of the organ as a concert instrument has worked a revolution, and in this connection the name of W. T. Best is to be for ever honoured. He was under the necessity of giving recitals week after week, and he found the original organ music sadly deficient. In order to form his varied programmes he began arranging: he laid all styles under contribution: he choose good music: he had the ability to transcribe and to perform it, and so he has done more than any other man to extend the resources of his instrument.

In order to secure for Best the esteem to which he is entitled, it must never be forgotten that when he first commenced arranging for his instrument, organ arrangements with pedal obbligato were practically non-existent, with the exception of a few movements by Dr. E. J. Hopkins, and others by George Cooper, the organist of the Chapel Royal. The idea of rendering orchestral, chamber, and pianoforte music on the organ was a novelty. This gave Best his chance; and the greatest credit is due to him for taking the chance and making such good use of it. But even then Best's arrangements excited great prejudice. Professor Ritter, sometime Professor of Music in Vassar College,—a musician whose activities were so frequently misdirected, especially in his later years—voiced this feeling of misunderstanding and dislike

in his formerly popular History of Music. After extolling Rinck, Schneider, Herzog, and other forgotten writers of the pedantic German school of a century or so ago, he says:

In opposition to their style . . . Best . . . and other organists . . . not being satisfied with that which the organ can do well, and utterly misunderstanding its true æsthetical resources, have tried, assisted by the wonderful improvements in its mechanical construction by ingenious organ-builders, to draw it from its own sphere, recklessly demanding from it somewhat coy and rather heavy mechanism [? did Ritter know nothing of pneumatic or electric actions?], and its slowly responding mass of sound, the manifold rich expressions of modern orchestration . . . Ingenious as some of their transcriptions of overtures, movements from symphonies and string quartets, may be, they are out of place when played on the organ; and when compared with real organ compositions . . . not worth the trouble of study.

This was written in the '70s. How strange it sounds to us—strange and remote, like the distant echoes of a dead controversy. To-day Ritter's opinions (largely based upon inadequate knowledge of organ construction and capacity) are entirely discredited. Which is as it should be.

It is, however, very doubtful whether Best would find to-day, as he found in the '60s of the last century, that almost every publishing firm of repute was willing to accept his manuscripts. Just at present many modern organists are filling their programmes with works whose only merit is their modernity, and refusing to educate the public by the rendering on the organ of standard and classical music, which, apart from these efforts, their audience would probably never hear at all. As a prominent London publisher once said to the writer concerning some of his organ arrangements of classics not hitherto set out for the kind of instruments, "Beautiful music, and beautifully arranged; but we have no market for it." There was a market for Best's arrangements. He supplied it skilfully. Hence the sales of his arrangements ran into four figures where to-day they might not run into more than two.

One of Best's earliest published volumes of arrangements was "The Organ Student," which contained a capital arrangement of the Andante from Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony, several Handel choruses, and movements from Beethoven, Mozart, Spohr, etc. A series of popular arrangements known as "The Organist's Miscellany" contained such tit-bits as the Rigadoon from Rameau's Dardanus, Schumann's Traümerei, Handel's "Lascia ch'io pianga," the Finale from Schumann's Études Symphoniques, several of Schubert's Marches, Handel's "O

ruddier than the cherry," arranged as a solo for the pedal reed, and many other popular items never before exhibited on three staves. Two lengthy and elaborate arrangements by Best are published separately, viz.:—the whole of Mendelssohn's Reformation Symphony, and Moscheles' Duet for 2 Pianos, "Homage à Handel," Op. 92, the latter of which makes a splendid concert solo and deserves a more frequent hearing. Best's arrangement of the Overture to Mozart's Magic Flute was a very early effort, quite incapable of being classed with or included amongst his later works.

But all Best's efforts in the direction of organ transcriptions are eclipsed by that magnificent series entitled "Arrangements from the Scores of the Great Masters" (Novello), amounting to 100 numbers and occupying five huge oblong folio volumes. These were commenced about 1850 and were completed about 1872. A detailed criticism of such a stupendous undertaking would be impossible here, but special mention may be made of the slow movements from several of the best symphonies and quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven; also selections from the choral and instrumental works of Bach; some of the finest airs, choruses, and overtures from Handel's oratorios; movements from the chamber and orchestral music of Mendelssohn and Spohr; the motetts of Haydn and Mozart; a large number of vocal and pianoforte pieces, pianoforte duets, music for pianoforte and violin; music for wind instruments, etc., almost every department of musical composition being represented in this musical pantheon.

To criticize individual movements would also be impossible within present limits. We may say however, that perhaps the most difficult of all the arrangements is that of the Overture to Mendelssohn's St. Paul; but such numbers as Haydn's "The Heavens are telling," Handel's Overture to Samson and "Fixed in His everlasting seat," Haydn's Romance from the Symphony "La Reine de France," and the Variations in A from a Symphony in D, Mozart's Larghetto from the Clarinet Quintet, the Larghetto from Beethoven's 2nd Symphony, Meyerbeer's Schiller March, Beethoven's Romances for Violin and Orchestra, Ops. 40 and 50, and Spohr's overtures to Jessonda, the Fall of Babylon and the Last Judgment, together with many others of similar calibre, are transcribed in such a manner as to make their arrangement inimitable and unsurpassable in spite of the fact that they had never been arranged for the organ before. Indeed, of Best's arrangements it may be said, as Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare, that they are "not of an age, but for all time."

Mr. George Augener, for whom Best commenced writing in 1875, says that he "always retained his MSS. when the printer had done with them; that he wrote in black ink for the notes, but put in the expression marks with red ink and the registering in blue." His charges for editing Mr. Augener considered high, but not exorbitant for the class of work accomplished. Best has been accused of "occasionally demanding impossible things on the part of the performer, particularly in the matter of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, when both feet and hands were otherwise occupied." This and many other criticisms were founded on a misunderstanding. Many of the apparently impossible expression marks were inserted because they were in the original. They were never intended to be observed in the organ performance, since it was necessary to sacrifice them there in order to secure a better general effect. Then many of Best's registration directions appeared fantastic or even absurd, but were not so when it was remembered that they mostly applied to the organ in St. George's Hall which, fortunately or otherwise, was the one which Best usually seemed to have in mind when transcribing for his instrument. The too literal adherence to his directions would often cause trouble. But none but the merest tyro would imagine that when Best wrote his favourite direction "Gt. Viola, 8 ft.," he meant every stop on the Great organ to be silenced except that mentioned. All that Best was demanding was the employment of string tone on the Great. Only he had his own way of asking for it.

Passing from local to general criticisms, we find ourselves in cordial agreement with Mr. Truette when he says that in his great series of arrangements last mentioned Best "showed that the organ is in itself capable of producing orchestral effects, without transcending its proper functions or descending to trickery." Dr. J. Higgs says concerning the same works, "Mr. Best often leaves his own individuality on the music he treats, and at times makes a demand for executive skill equal to his own, and seems to arrange for an instrument of exceptional resource. . . His Arrangements remain a monument of his industry and extensive musical reading."

We have left to the last any mention of Best's transcriptions of Handel and editions of Bach because each is in its way absolutely unique. Up to the middle of the last century Handel's choruses were only available for the organ in two-stave arrangements, marked "for organ or pianoforte" but generally suitable for neither. To remedy this Best issued his magnificent collection of 130

choruses, "selected from all Handel's Oratorios and Anthems, and arranged for the Organ with Pedal Obbligato." In the arrangement of these choruses Best claimed that he had "specially endeavoured to render them facile to the performer without at the same time losing sight of the massive characteristics of the great composer, and the due representation of his works upon an instrument so grand and complete in itself as the organ." It is doubtful whether for fidelity to the text, clearness of part progression and of effect, this edition has ever been surpassed. To say that all the arrangements were simple would be untrue, but many of the difficulties of Best's arrangements vanish when one becomes used to the method he so frequently adopted of confining himself as far as possible to the bass clef for the lower of his two manual staves, placing on this staff one part only, and writing the part for the left hand partly on the lower and partly on the upper staff, thus avoiding change of clefs and perplexing ledger lines. We give an example from the chorus "Let their Celestial Concerts all unite." (Samson):



This method is the pet aversion of editors not acquainted with the Best tradition; but its use frequently simplifies the reading and renders the task of writing a far easier one than when numerous ledger lines have to be negotiated and perpetual changes of clef indulged in. Of course it cannot be maintained that the choice of choruses for arrangement is above criticism. Some are omitted which we should like to have seen inserted, and *vice versa*; but this happens whenever and under whatever circumstances any attempt at selection may be made. To every editor must be given the credit in compilation of knowing "what is best to be avoided in the construction thereof."

The history of Handel's Organ Concertos is too well known to call for detailed mention here. Suffice it to say that they were first performed during the Lent season of 1732, at Covent Garden Theatre, London, between the acts of the oratorios, and being an instant success were repeated in subsequent years. Of the 23

concertos, most of which were adaptations from earlier works, the popularity was so great that Dr. Burney says, "public players on keyed instruments, as well as private, totally subsisted on these concertos for nearly 30 years."

They were written for orchestra and organ, the latter being of "limited dimensions and destitute of a pedal board." Best's task was to amalgamate the orchestral and organ parts, evolve a pedal part from the orchestral and organ bass, amplify the harmonies, and so render these works available for one performer on the modern organ. How well the great virtuoso accomplished this undertaking can be seen by reference to the first set of Six Concertos (Novello), to the second set (Boosey), compiled by Best from various Handelian movements, and to the isolated concertos published by Ricordi and others, also to the editions of some single concertos for organ and orchestra published by Augener. After such examination every unprejudiced observer must be impressed with the evidences of Best's deep reverence for the original, exhibited simultaneously with the clearest possible conception of the requirements of the modern organist and the capabilities of his instrument. The amplification of Handel's thin scoring is particularly fine, while the contrasts between organ and orchestra and the occasional solo passages for obbligato instrument are all faithfully depicted by change of manual and choice of stops in the solo arrangement. As is well known, the custom in Handel's day and in somewhat later times was for the composer of the concerto to extemporize a cadenza at the place appointed for the latter. Owing to the decline of extempore playing this custom gradually fell into desuetude, and the cadenzas omitted by the earlier composers are now frequently supplied by more or less competent editors. In the case of pianoforte concertos this procedure has aroused no protest; but in the case of Handel's organ concertos the cadenzas supplied by Best appear to have stirred up quite a little cloud of critical and controversial dust. Yet Best's cadenzas are thoroughly Handelian in spirit, and they lack the decorous dullness of Rinck, Rheinberger, etc. They are Handel expressed in the idiom of W. T. Best, perhaps what Handel might have said had he possessed the technique and the instrument of his 19th century exponent. Hence Best's cadenzas do not find favour with the "made in Germany" type of organist. Yet, notwithstanding this, some of them are models of artistic development. Those to the 2nd and 4th concertos of the first set should be consulted in this connection; while in the so-called Cuckoo and Nightingale Concerto we have another example as beautiful as it is short. We

quote the principal theme as well as the cadenza in order to facilitate comparison:

In addition to the Handel concertos and choruses Best showed how "deeply studied" in Handel's music he really was by transcribing for the organ for Augener & Co. "extracts from Instrumental Music of Handel now rarely performed; the Curtain Tunes, Marches, and other incidental music of the Italian Operas, Selections from the Sonatas for Stringed Instruments, Organ and Harpsichord Music, Oboe Concertos, Grand Concertos, Water and Fire Music, etc." The arrangements were afterwards chosen from more varied sources, included in two volumes, and termed

the Handel Album. They comprised a large number of Overtures to Handel's various operas, as well as several movements from the lesser known oratorios and anthems. Apart from the excellent manner of the transcriptions, the matter of the whole series is invaluable to a student desirous of acquaintance with some of the more obscure works of the "giant Saxon."

As an editor of Bach's organ works Best came into notice in the year 1885, when he commenced for Messrs. Augener & Co. his bi-centenary edition—"an English undertaking, edited by an Englishman whose name," says the *Musical Record*, "is a guarantee of his fitness for the task." Apart from the excellence of the engraving, the great features of Best's edition are the *tempo* indications, showing a modern concert speed rather than the fashionable sleepy *tempo* of a past period; assistance to the performer in matters of fingering and pedalling; elucidations in foot notes, of the old *Agréments* or *Manieren*, so little understood, apparently, in the present day; and, lastly, and even more important than all, from a 'past master' in the art, a guide as to the proper registering or combination of stops, to be adopted in each piece." "Further," says the reviewer, "the text has been subjected to thorough revision, the editor going the length of reducing the whole to manuscript, in order to render the design of each work conspicuously plain to the student; and the left hand part in particular has been the object of painstaking attention, the full extent of which will only be apparent to the practised executant, who knows but too well how the 'inner parts' are inartistically jumbled together even by composers themselves, to say nothing of the doings of untrained copyists and transcribers." Of this edition 17 volumes were published before Best's death, the remainder being completed by Dr. Turpin. In the revised edition recently issued under the able editorship of Dr. Eaglefield Hull, of Huddersfield, Best's work has been retained with the exception of the substitution of "continental" for the orchestral or so-called "English" fingering; and with the addition of registration better adapted to ordinary organs, and of additional phrasing and pedalling—not always an improvement, we venture to think. It is much to be regretted that the publishers have not seen fit to continue the issue of this fine edition in single numbers, the former issue of which was so great a boon to the recitalist not caring to be burdened with huge volumes while on tour.

The objection to Best's arrangements of the Handelian Concertos has been urged against his edition of Bach's organ works, viz., that the prescribed treatment is essentially of the editor,

editorial. This scruple, in the case of the Bach edition, was strengthened by a reference to Best's registration and *tempo*, of which the former appeared fanciful, but came out with remarkable effect upon his own organ, and the latter too rapid, whereas Best was simply working under the impression that all performers possessed his facile technique and easily manipulated organ. Then in the matter of fingering, phrasing, and part-distribution, Best broke new ground, giving us not the Bach of the pedant but the Bach of the modern concert virtuoso. As an example of his phrasing which was never petty or undignified, take the subject of the G minor Fugue:



His fingering and registration defy adequate quotation, but for the distribution of the manual parts one has only to compare his edition with, let us say, that of Peters to see that his work was not only undertaken *con amore*, but that it was the practical expression of a life's study and experience in the public performance of the organ works of the Leipsic Cantor. As such this edition has stood the test—the acid test if you will—of more than thirty years' constant use and still more constant criticism, a good deal of the latter being neither courteous nor fair.

Public indebtedness to Best extends beyond the various points indicated in this study to at least two others. It is to him that we owe the introduction of the annotated programme in our public organ recitals. And it is very probable that to him we are indebted for the very use of the word "recital" in this connection. According to Mr. F. G. Edwards, the late editor of the *Musical Times*, the expression "organ performance" was only supplemented by the less cumbersome term "recital" as late as December 4, 1867, when Best was announced to give an organ "recital" at Union Chapel, Islington, London, a Congregational church made famous by the ministry of that gifted preacher and amateur musician, Dr. Henry Allon, the editor of the *Congregational Psalmist* and of the *British Quarterly Review*, and by the organ playing of Professor Prout and Mr. Fountain Meen. Whether the expression "organ recital" was adopted at the suggestion of the great recitalist or of the Union church authorities this witness deponeth not. But if Best did not originate the term with reference to organ performances he both admitted and approved of its use. Otherwise he would have expended

upon it a little more of his vitriolic sarcasm concerning the employment of which on this occasion history is absolutely silent.

Other works of Best there were, but the space in which to refer to them has long ago been exhausted. For this reason this study, which is neither an essay nor a biography, and which had no prologue, can now have no epilogue. The desire of its writer is primarily, persistently, and finally, to do some small measure of justice, and pay some humble respect to the life and labours of a man who, as the greatest virtuoso on the organ the world has ever known, the originator and perfector of organ arrangements, a model editor and transcriber, and a composer of no mean merit, was a musician concerning whom "take him for all in all" we may well ask with Horace

*Quando ullum inveniet parem?*